

ESSAIS

57 Boulevard de la Villette 75010 Paris

Zazou Roddam

Preconditions

Curated by Ben Broome

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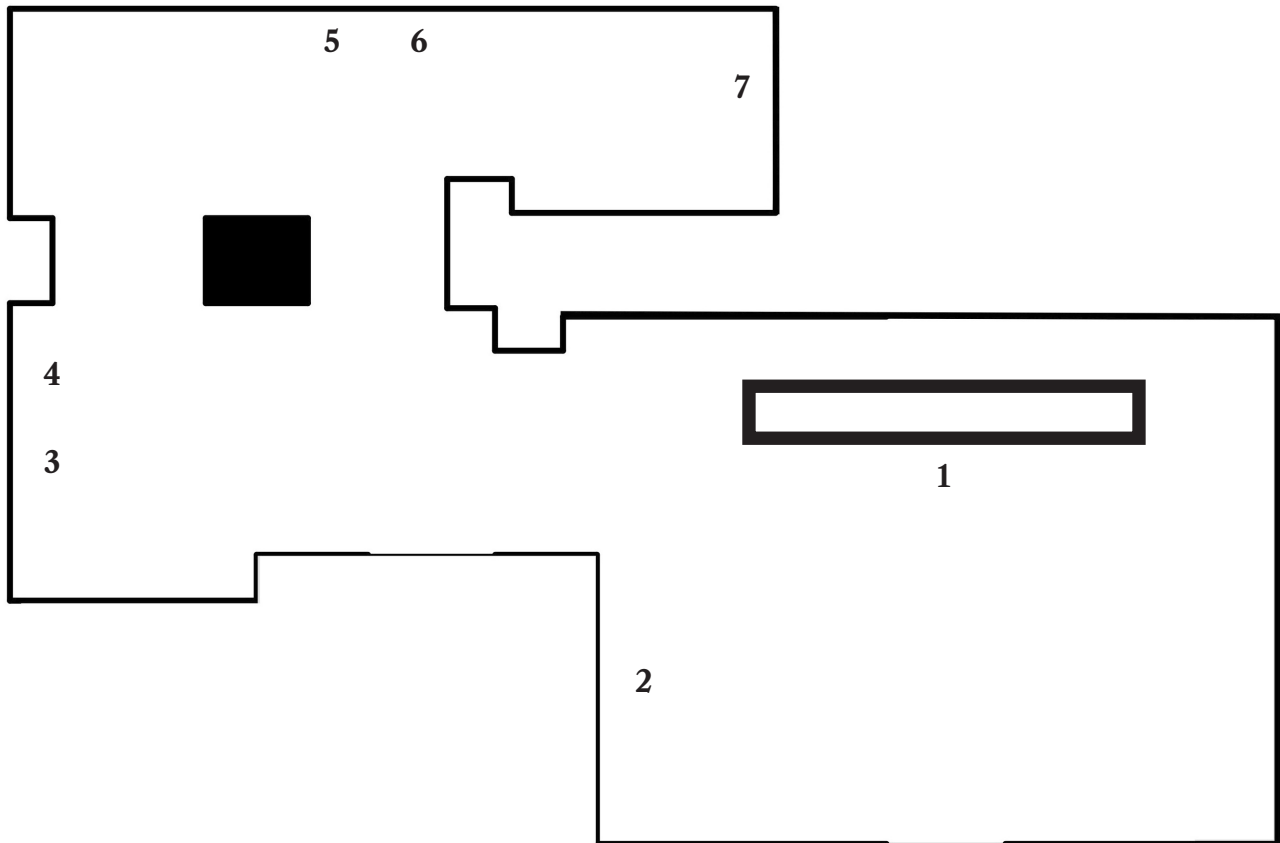
Engrenages (2005 - 2020), the French detective show that ran for eight seasons on Canal+, provides the source material for Zazou Roddam's moving image work *Preconditions of Another Life* (2026) presented here at Essais set into a purpose built pillar. The buildings and streets of Paris make up the backdrop for the judicial drama and it's these shots that Roddam isolates and then compiles chronologically to shape this work, forming a portrait of the French capital between 2005 and 2020 through the lens of this piece of mass media.

Tracking shots, pans and crash zooms, used heavily in *Engrenages* to evoke a certain mood or the passage of time, butt up against each other in *Preconditions of Another Life*. Here, the dramatic narrative these shots once shaped remains a mystery. The tension they build has no escape or means of release, remaining trapped inside the closed-system of the work. For the score Composer Luca Mantero stretched and chopped up music from 1950s TV commercials - written to mimic the style of popular-at-the-time Disney soundtracks - laying his arrangements incongruously over Roddam's video rips. Without the context in which it once existed, *Preconditions of Another Life* could just as easily be made up of stock footage, Its score - library music.

In the video, Roddam has zoomed into scenes from *Engrenages* to detach architectural elements from the narratives playing out in the foreground - the perfect image of Paris compromised, blurred or pixelated where it has been pulled beyond its resolution. The six framed photographs flanking Roddam's video installation are similarly edited; only physically as opposed to digitally. Historical photographs of architectural models - proposals for mostly unrealised buildings designed for American cities amid the economic boom of the 1960s and subsequent recession of the 70s - are partitioned by blank frame mats. A window offers up only a sliver of the photograph underneath. Roddam's editing of these entirely black and white photographs removes their mundanity and heightens their drama with some recalling a Hitchcockian film noir.

Roddam's 2022-23 work *Pop Inflection (The City)* set the stage for *Preconditions of Another Life*, employing a similar tracing of a city and its architecture as portrayed through the pop culture sensation, *Sex and the City* (1998–2004). Roddam assembled B-roll and establishing shots of New York to map the city's social and urban shifts over the run of the show, fittingly ending with a shot of the Seine taken from the final episode, An 'American Girl in Paris – Part Deux' (S6E20). For *Preconditions of Another Life*, Roddam applied a similar methodology but the two works resist easy comparison: the workings of the American metropolis differ fundamentally from their European counterparts. Paris and its architecture, compared with the fluidity of New York's skyline, could be frozen in the 19th century. Haussmann's severe urban renewal still dominates and it's the Palais de Justice, remodelled under Haussmann's authority during the 1850s–1860s, that serves as the anchor point for *Engrenages*. Its repeated appearance in the work, a reminder that Law and order form preconditions for life as we know it. Nevertheless, Roddam's assemblage of clips - despite imaging real places - ultimately exists in a fictional universe, another life. Together, the works in *Preconditions* exist suspended from linear time, caught in limbo as abstractions of their original forms.

Ben Broome



1. *Preconditions of Another Life*, 2026, single-channel video, colour, 9:40
2. *Crocker Galleria (Realised)*, 2026, Found photograph, framed, Unique 1/1, 30 x 40 cm
3. *State office building (Proposed)*, 2026, Found photograph, framed, Unique 1/1, 30 x 40 cm
4. *Imperial House (Realised)*, 2026, Found photograph, framed, Unique 1/1, 30 x 40 cm
5. *Boston Stadium (Proposed)* , 2026, Found photograph, framed, Unique 1/1, 30 x 40 cm
6. *Sperry Univac Plaza (Proposed)*, 2026, Found photograph, framed, Unique 1/1, 30 x 40 cm
7. *Federal office building (Proposed)*, 2026, Found photograph, framed, Unique 1/1, 30 x 40 cm